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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0226
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003506

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/I, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/05/2018
TAGS: [KIRF](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: CHRISTIAN LEADERS DISAPPOINTED IN QUOTAS OUTCOME;
UNAMI MORE POSITIVE

REF: BAGHDAD 3489

Classified By: By Political Counselor Robert S. Ford for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d).

Summary and Comment

11. (C) Several prominent Christian leaders expressed bitter disappointment over the single-seat minority quotas in the Provincial Elections Law (PEL) passed on November 3 (reftel), and several minority groups issued a joint protest statement on November 4. While all were frustrated, views on why the quotas for minorities, and especially Christians, who believe their greater numbers entitle them to more seats, were reduced to only single seats differed. Their ideas on what Christians should do next to register their dismay also vary. UNAMI had put forward a proposal that would have given more seats to Christian minorities, but it views the November 3 PEL outcome as a step forward for minorities. We share UNAMI's view that the Council of Representatives has acknowledged the principle of minority rights, even if the seats fall short of the desired outcome from the minorities' point of view. Christian political leaders likely will keep pushing for a larger quota of seats in selected provincial councils for the 2009 and future provincial elections. The Ambassador had urged Parliament speaker Mashadani and Vice President Abdel Mehdi from the main Shia Islamist bloc to support the original UNAMI proposal. Looking forward, the Embassy is in constant contact with a variety of Christian and other minority group activists as the Christian political leaders themselves ponder their next steps. End summary and comment.

Unrealistic Expectations

12. (C) Yonadem Kanna, a parliamentarian and leader of the Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM), bitterly complained to PMIN on November 4 about the Council of Representatives' setting aside only one seat for Christians in Ninewah and Baghdad during its November 3 vote on Article 50 of the Provincial Elections. He said the parliament's Sunni Arab and Shia majority had refused to grant more because they feared that a larger Christian contingent in the Ninewah provincial council would team up with the eventual Kurdish contingent to reach the one-third of the council's membership required by law to seek integration of Ninewah into the Kurdish Regional Government. (Comment: another prominent parliamentarian, Hamid Musa of the Iraqi Communist party, explained the political calculation in the exact same terms on November 4. Anti-Kurdish parliamentarian Hanan Qeddo, from the Ninewah Shebak community, went a step further and charged that the Kurds had encouraged Kanna to seek three seats in Ninewah knowing that it would trigger the backlash from the Sunni Arabs and Shia and thus make the Kurds look better. End Comment.) Kanna acknowledged it was unlikely there would be yet another amendment to change minority

representation for the councils elected in 2009. He said the Christian leadership might call for a boycott. PMIN cautioned against a boycott, noting that the Iraqi Christians instead should mobilize their voters to lock in the official recognition that they had secured and to demonstrate that the set-aside for them does not reflect the true numbers of Iraq's Christian communities.

13. (C) Hashim Al-Ta'e, chairman of the CoR ad hoc committee on provincial elections, in meetings with Deputy Polcouns before and after the September 24 vote, said that Kanna met with him numerous times to try to increase the Christian quotas. Al-Ta'e said he believed Kanna's demands were unrealistic, told Kanna as much, and urged him to take what he could get. Al-Ta'e pointed out that Kanna was not even satisfied with the original Article 50 (excluded from the PEL passed on September 24), which granted Christians 3 seats in each of Ninewah and Baghdad and one in Basrah. Al-Ta'e did not say if Kanna had lobbied others on the quota issue; he might not have known.

14. (C) Chaldean Democratic Union Party leader (Kurdish Alliance) parliamentarian Ablahad Afram Sawa claimed to Poloff on November 4 that the outcome was plotted by those in the CoR who oppose minority representation. He noted that only the Sadrists and Kurdish Alliance supported the Christians. Sawa said he and fellow CoR member Yonadam Kanna will try to get other Christians in the GOI, e.g., Minister of Industry Fawzi Hariri (KDP) and Minister of Human Rights Wijdan Salim (Independent) to support an election boycott. Kanna and Sawa have already sent a letter to the CoR Presidency Council requesting that the PEL be vetoed, but

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Sawa acknowledged that it was unlikely that would happen a second time.

15. (U) Assyrian, Turkmen, Yezidi, and Mandeian leaders issued a joint statement November 4 protesting the November 3 vote, denouncing "political oppression against minorities in Iraq" and calling for a "reversal" of the COR decision as soon as possible in order to prevent the "marginalization" of "weak and vulnerable Iraqi communities."

Advice for the Politicians

16. (C) In contrast, Non-Muslim Endowments Director Abdullah Al-Naufali, told Poloff the same day that a boycott or a veto would serve no purpose. Al-Naufali believes Christians in Iraq should organize large, peaceful demonstrations to protest the single-seat Christian quotas. Al-Naufali believes Iraq's Christian religious leadership should meet with GOI leaders to drive home their concerns about the way Iraq's Christians' are being marginalized. However, the underlying cause of this "defeat," according to al-Naufali, is not those who oppose minority representation, but the political disunity and disarray of the Christians themselves. Al-Naufali urged the U.S. to help convince Iraqi Christian leaders that they must unite and speak up for their rights with one voice.

17. (C) Journalist, human rights activist and Assyrian Democratic Movement (ADM) member William Warda told Poloff on November 4 that it was unjust to give Christians the same status as the Yezidis and Shabak (these two minorities also got single seats in Ninewa). Warda's reasoning was that there are far more Christians than Yezidis or Shabak. In addition, Christians are "better educated and qualified" and have "made greater contributions" to Iraq. Warda said this unfair outcome will only encourage more Christians to leave Iraq permanently. As for himself, he does not plan to vote in the provincial elections because "Why should I accept this gift (of one seat) from the racist Iraqi politicians?" Warda believes many Christians will boycott the elections. Nevertheless, he agreed it would do no good to veto the PEL

(as suggested by Kanna and Sawa) and delay the elections. That would only serve to strengthen the positions of the blocs in power.

UNAMI: A Glass Half-Full"

18. (C) UNAMI official Andrew Gilmour told PMIN on November 4 that SRSG deMastura perceived the November 3 outcome as a small victory for minorities; there are six seats guaranteed for minorities in provincial councils where before there had been none. deMastura had never seriously thought his proposal of 3 Christian seats reserved in Ninewah and Baghdad would pass. Instead, this had been an opening negotiating ploy, according to Gilmour. The UNAMI team recognized that this outcome disappointed Iraqi Christian political leaders, but the official recognition of the Christian, Shebak and Yazidi communities was at least a glass "half-full." This is only a beginning, Gilmour observed. There would be other elections, and election laws, in the future. UNAMI released a press statement November 4 that welcomed the decision to allocate specific seats to minority groups and noted that the amendment to the law does not give a larger representation for Iraqi minorities but urged the Presidency Council nonetheless to approve the amendment.

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